



Providing Over 30 Years of Guidance for Business Growth for Illinois Small Businesses

**March 17, 2014**



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### **2014 Women Business Owners Symposium (WBOS)**

Women-owned enterprises are thriving across the country! The State of Illinois and the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) are proud to announce the 2nd annual [2014 Women Business Owners Symposium \(WBOS\)](#). The WBOS is a full-day program that offers both current and future women business owners access to a variety of experts, programs, and opportunities that will help grow their businesses. Last year, WBOS concluded with a tremendous turnout of about 1,000 attendees, and 812 pre-registered companies across various industries and sectors. Let's see if we can make this year even bigger!

WBOS is March 27th, 2014 (in Chicago, IL) so make sure to [register today!](#)




### **New Online Courses from SBA GCB**

The U. S. SBA's Office of Government Contracting and Business Development (GCBD) is pleased to introduce two new online courses and workbooks: ***How to Prepare Government Contract Proposals*** and ***Understanding HUBZone Designations***. The new courses are featured with some twenty other contracting-specific training modules available via SBA's Online Learning Center and the GC Classroom.

The proposal preparation course is designed to help small businesses, interested in contracting with the government to better understand the solicitation process, maneuver through process requirements and respond effectively. Course topics include: types of government solicitations; Standard Forms used by the government; how to write the proposal; costs and pricing guidelines; key resources; and others.

The HUBZone course is the first in a series of mini-primers designed to provide focus and clarity around specific HUBZone topics. This module speaks specifically to what HUBZone designations are, how they are determined, where they are located and how to find them.

Both training modules are easy to use, comprehensive, self-paced and indexed such that any specific topic within the modules can be quickly accessed. The workbooks are designed to accompany the courses, but can also be used as stand-alone instructional guides. The workbooks are provided in downloadable PDF formats – for easy client access or electronic distribution.

View the Courses & Workbooks	
	GC Classroom -- <a href="http://www.sba.gov/gcclassroom">www.sba.gov/gcclassroom</a>
	Online Learning Center -- <a href="http://www.sba.gov/training">www.sba.gov/training</a>

GCBD is committed to building quality training programs that meet the needs of small business clients, agency staff and contracting officers. They welcome your feedback and comments regarding additional training materials.

### **Dealing With Customers Who Abuse Return Policies**

By Karen E. Klein on *businessweek.com*, 1/16/14 - **Question:** We're a startup that manufactures and sells proprietary, patented consumer products. How should we deal with the small percentage of customers who disregard or abuse our return policy; claim they never received a package when delivery tracking shows they did; or claim the product arrived damaged and demand a replacement—but refuse to ship the damaged part back?

**Answer:** You're confronting an unfortunate business reality: There will always be customers who try to take advantage of you. As a startup, you should determine whether you have an unusually high number of these misbehaving customers, perhaps as a result of some aspect of your operation or product line that is underperforming. Seek out a manufacturing or professional association, or perhaps a consultant or trade publication, for benchmarks. If it turns out that your customer dissatisfaction rate is higher than average, make the needed upgrades to your products or service.

If, however, you are just dealing with the typical number of pain-in-the-neck customers—welcome to retail, says [Andrew Sobel](#), a client service consultant and co-author of the new book *Power Relationships: 26 Irrefutable Laws for Building Extraordinary Relationships*. He recommends erring on the side of creating lifelong customers. "When it's a low-value product, it's not worth your time to fight with those people," he says. "A customer-centric company is willing to benefit from the goodwill you earn by being a little lenient, because that goodwill brings far more benefit than the cost of getting ripped off by a few people."

Learn more at: <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-01-16/dealing-with-customers-who-abuse-return-policies>

### **Program Success of the Week – Brush Architecture**

After fifteen years of experience in the preservation architectural field, Mary Brush launched her own firm specializing in the restoration and design of existing buildings. Brush Architects focuses on the exterior elements of a building including: doors, windows, paneling and more. This is Ms. Brush's first company and things are going well. After only a year and a half, Brush Architects has already won many impressive and substantial public and private projects.

Ms. Brush cites her company's quick success to the combination of attending the Illinois Small Business Development Center Women's Business Development Center's (WBDC) Fast Track training series and her Woman's Business Enterprise (WBE) Certification. She explains that the Fast Track series developed basic business skills; "from the series I created a five-year business plan that was well-researched and geared toward my target markets." WBE Certification helped her win contracts with the government and other institutions who seek out this valued accreditation.

Throughout the past year Mary has had various counseling sessions with the WBDC's Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) to help her learn about government contracting opportunities. PTAC assistance helped Brush Architecture recently win a contract with the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. The firm will act as preservation architects on retainer when restorations and repairs are needed.

Mary expects continued growth; "I see a larger workspace and more employees, although I want the company to grow responsibly and with a watchful eye." Brush Architecture is reaching impressive project goals for such a young company and profited greatly from its work with the Illinois Small Business Development Network.

### **Resource of the Week – Illinois SBDC at Duman Center Credit Builder**

Several SBDC's have commented on the benefits of sending clients to this program offered at the Duman Center SBDC. Their goal is "to help you build a positive credit rating. This is important whether you are starting a new business, looking for a job or are just starting out and have not yet established your credit rating. Whatever your dreams are, we want to help you have the credit rating to achieve them.

Learn more at: <http://jvschicago.org/small-business-services/credit-builder-program/>

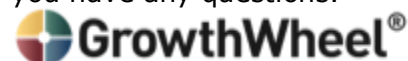
### **Neoserra/WebCATS Update – Neoserra Link**

To get on to Neoserra, the new iteration of WebCATS, open the link below and type in your WebCATS log on and password.

<https://illinois.neoserra.com>

### **GrowthWheel®**

Please notify your Network Coordinator this week if you or any of your business advisors at your Illinois SBDC would be interested in participating in a future GrowthWheel® training program to become a certified GrowthWheel® business advisor. Also please let us know if you have any questions.



## **Moves and News - February-March 2014 The Small Business Advocate**

The [SBA's February-March issue of The Small Business Advocate](#) features the FY 2013 Report on the Regulatory Flexibility Act. The report shows how well federal agencies took small entities into account in their rulemaking last year. Recent Advocacy news includes regulatory comment letters on the SEC's crowdfunding proposal and OSHA's silica proposal; two research publications on small business finance; and a report on a Maryland small business conference in which Advocacy staff participated. Also featured is the new chair of the Senate Small Business Committee, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), and a tour of women-owned businesses in New Hampshire.

## **America's SBDC Network Connect**

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to see the March 6, 2014 edition of [America's SBDC Network Connect newsletter](#).

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The **WEEKLY CONNECTION** is distributed by the Illinois SBDC and DCEO Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology each Monday to members of the DCEO Illinois SBDC Network to provide the service delivery partners with regular updates on small business issues, opportunities and resources. You may send any information to share with the Illinois SBDC Network to [Tom.Becker@illinois.gov](mailto:Tom.Becker@illinois.gov). Please feel free to forward this update to other interested resource providers and key stakeholders.

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